

Halo versus Predator: Draft

by The Mar

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1. Predator and Prey

****Predator and Prey****

Guan'De roared a challenge, the sound reverberating in his helmet. His prey stared at him, pure malice shooting from its reptilian eyes; malice that he knew also reflected from his own. Its tail snaked back and forth behind it, its razor sharp tip glinting in the moonlight. Guan'De measured the distance between them mentally.

'_Fifteen meters,' _he thought. Detaching his combistaff from his belt, he snapped it to its full length. He twirled it once in his hand, swung it into position, and dropped to a combat stance. The creature leaped.

With one bound, the Kainde Ahmedha covered the fifteen meters between them. Screeching its piercing war cry as it came, it contorted its body and knocked the combistaff out of Guan's hand. Time shuddered almost to a halt as the two titans connected. Striking with its tail, the Xenomorph sought to impale him on its spear like point.

"M-di H'dlak," Guan muttered to himself as he barely dodged its tail; regrettably, the Yautjian words "no fear" did not halt the Xenomorph's dreadful attack.

Its claws scraped large furrows in his helmet and body armor, trying to force him into a position where it could use its second mouth to punch a hole into his brain. But Guan was familiar with his Prey's ways; he tucked his legs under then kicked out as hard as he could and quickly leapt to his feet as he watched his foe fly back a good distance.

He extended his customized wrists blades to their full three-quarters of a meter with a flourish, the polished metal reflecting the light

full moon. After the standard half meter blade he had used on his first hunt failed him, he had made longer and stronger ones. Since then, he had taken meticulous care of them, even treating them like his body armor so they would be acid resistant.

The rivals restarted their deadly dance, circling one another, waiting for an opening. The Xenomorph led, wildly lashing out with its tail, it nearly speared him, but he was ready for it. He twisted to the side and slashed with his dangerously sharp wrist blades, severing a whole meter of its tail from its body.

The beast shrieked in pain as it collapsed on all-fours and hastily scrambled back into the benighted jungle, the acidic blood streaming from its tail, burning into the rainforest's floor.

Guan chuckled to himself while eyeing the beast as he detached a shuriken from his belt.

'_So, it ends.'_ He hurled the shuriken.

Warmth seeped throughout his body as his mind suddenly awakened. His nerves tingled all over his body, but he could hardly move. His eyes opened and darted back and forth, trying to identify his surroundings. He was in a large room with gray, metallic walls and bulkheads along the sides. In front of his face, past his helmet visor, was a glass covering that confined him in the small space; then, as instant as a flash of lightning, he remembered.

His cryo-tube hissed open, as a cryo-bay technician quickly approached him. The exhaust from the tube billowed around him. The newly awakened soldier slowly looked up at the wall into the control room overlooking the cryo-bay. Above, there was another technician manning the console in the control room.

The first technician turned away and addressed the one manning the console.

"You'd better get to your evac-group, Sam." he said urgently. Sam nodded in agreement as he worked the controls at his console.

"Right," he responded "I just have to re-set the computer and I'm out of here." There was a loud bang at the control room door; everyone instantly looked to it.

"Oh no!" Sam yelled "They're trying to get through the door! Security, intruders in cryo-" Sam was interrupted by an abrupt explosion. The door was blasted to pieces and two large figures walked through the opening, bearing handheld plasma weapons. Sam took several steps backward as the invaders walk toward him; his expression was enveloped in fear as they raised their weapons. Sam froze, staring frightfully into their cold eyes.

"No, please don't!" he screamed as the assailants fired; his lifeless and plasma-burnt body thudded as it struck the metal floor of the control room.

"Sam, Sam!" yelled the tech. He turned back and glanced at the Marine.

"Come on, we've got to get the heck out of here!" the Technician exclaimed, as the large, armored soldier climbed out of the tube, "This way!"

The tech sprinted through the door, the Marine half a step behind him. As the Tech paced down the corridor and opened the hall door, an explosion ripped through the wall; he screamed as shrapnel shredded his body. He dropped dead; the Soldier didn't bother to check for a pulse. He was now alone.

He surveyed the door. It obviously was damaged beyond repair; the servos that opened and closed it were now slag. He quickly studied the corridor; he found only one possible exit. He wasn't sure where to go from there, for his mind was still recovering from his long sleep; but he knew that it was dangerous to stay there.

He traversed through several recognizable passages, until he could hear distant gun fire echoing throughout the corridors. He cautiously continued on towards the commotion, not knowing what lay ahead; he soon found himself in the middle of a tense fire fight between several marines and many different types of familiar aliens. An Aussie marine approached him, sweat pouring off of his face.

"Sir, the Captain needs you on the bridge A.S.A.P. You'd better follow me." he shouted above the weapons fire. A plasma bolt shot between the two marines, and they both leapt between the barricades placed in the corridor. "It's now or never." said the Aussie."

He turned to his fellow marines. "I'm escorting the Chief to the bridge. Keep up the good work, mates!"

They set off from the battle and made their way through a nearby weapons locker. It had been exhausted of all ammunition and weapons, and had been piling up with wounded and dead marines for some time. The ship was obviously being boarded by the enemy; the Covenant were giving the marines a run for their money.

It wasn't too long before they reached the entrance to the bridge, but the intruders were close by, and the marine's numbers were dwindling rapidly. It was for that reason that the Aussie turned back to hold off the enemy at the entry way of the deck.

The Chief entered the bridge, passing through a small platoon of soldiers guarding the entrance, and made his way to the forward section. He approached the main view screen at the center of the command deck, and there, before the screen stood an aged man with very military bearing, wearing a grey uniform with hair equally as grey. He was blowing puffs of smoke out of his mouth, while holding the end of a pipe between his teeth.

The Chief slowly walked up behind the man, towering over him by a third of a meter. "Captain Keyes." the Chief addressed him in his faintly raspy voice. The Captain turned and firmly shook the Marine's hand.

"Good to see you, Master Chief. Things aren't going well."

The Covenant's boarding parties crawled through the ship like termites through an old, rotted house. A single lifeboat was all that remained.

The Master Chief vaulted over the barricade that he had been using for cover, spraying the minor ranked Covenant elites in blue armor who were standing guard by the life pod with his assault rifle. Their shielding could not long withstand his onslaught, for by the time they realized that they were under attack; they were drowning in their own blood.

Heavy fire from a dozen Covenant cruisers' plasma cannons had been thundering into the hull of the Pillar of Autumn for a good part of an hour. The life pods' best chance for survival was a large ring that appeared to be orbiting the gas giant nearest to it. The Chief wondered at the ship's location: when the Pillar of Autumn left the battle at Reach, it was forced to make a blind jump into space, so as to not lead the enemy Covenant Armada to Earth.

Though they accomplished their goal of not compromising Earth's safety, they had been followed by an entire fleet of Covenant battle cruisers. As soon as all the lifeboats were launched, Captain Keyes planned to land the Pillar on the Ring, hopefully bringing down some of the Covenant with him.

The Chief turned and laid down cover fire on the Covenant soldiers rounding the corner. Two Covenant grunts dropped dead, their phosphorescent blood splattering on the Pillar's deck; an elite returned fire. The Chief ducked back behind cover, then ran to the pod door as plasma bolts melted holes into the wall behind him.

He quickly checked the hallway; one marine had not yet reached the safety of the life pod. Stumbling, he fell just as the Chief charged toward the open pod door.

"One last lifeboat!" yelled a female voice. "Quick, get aboard before it launches!"

The sounds of explosions were echoing throughout the entire vessel, and the bulkheads were shaking as the ship was continually beat down by the ruthless Covenant fleet.

"Oh no, oh no!" the fallen marine shrieked.

The Chief picked up the marine by the back of his armor vest and tossed him into the pod. He turned toward the Covenant soldiers who were following them, drew his pistol and fired several rounds into the fray.

"Now would be a_ very_ good time to leave!" the voice urged again.

The Master Chief ducked through the small doorway and entered the pod, sealing the hatch behind him. He turned to the Marine in the pilot's seat.

"Punch it." he ordered.

"Aye, aye sir." she responded.

The lifeboat's thrusters ignited, blasting it into the void of space. The small craft shot away just in time to escape the weapons fire of a nearby Covenant battle-cruiser.

"We're disengaged; going for minimum safe distance." reported the Pilot. After several seconds, the pod cleared the Pillar of Autumn. The recently rescued marine looked up into the Chief's mask, unable to see his expression.

"We're going to make it, aren't we sir? I don't want to die out here!"

The Chief put his hand on the troubled marine's shoulder, indicating his confidence that they'd survive. Then, out of curiosity, he walked up to the front of the pod to get a better view.

"Look." said the voice.

The Chief spotted their destination. The Ring's inner surface looked very similar to that of Earths - different kinds of land masses, bodies of water, forests and mountain ranges. It appeared to possess all of the traits of a regular minshara class planet. The outer surface however was metallic and mechanical; almost like a giant machine.

"What is that thing, Lieutenant?" a marine asked the pilot.

"Heck if I know," she responded "but we're landing on it."

Another marine looked back to see the Pillar of Autumn sustain several more hits from the relentless enemy vessels. The massive ship plunged towards the ring's surface, passing up the lifeboat as it came.

"The Autumn!" the marine shouted, "She's been hit!"

"I knew it!" the voice exclaimed, "The Autumn is accelerating; Keyes must be flying her in manually!"

"Heads up, everyone; we'll be entering the Ring's atmosphere in five." said the Pilot as the lifeboat began to shake violently. The Chief was nearly shaken to the floor but quickly braced himself on the pod wall.

"Are you sure you wouldn't rather take a seat?" the voice asked.

"We'll be fine." he said to her reassuringly. They all assumed the worst as the life-boat began to pass through the upper atmosphere, flames dancing off of the outer hull.

"If I still had fingers, they'd be crossed."

Guan felt disgusted as he watched twelve large warships hammering, what looked to him like a colony ship. 'Where is the honor in just murdering thousands upon thousands of helpless Oomans?' he thought. Still, the colonist showed a great deal of intelligence and resilience determining from the fact that they had been able to destroy four of the large warships, and disable several more.

He had been investigating the large ring-like planet in the system to find out if there were any creatures on it that would make good trophies for his collection. Thus far, he had found none.

When this colony ship dropped out of light speed, it tore an enormous hole in subspace. The armada of ships that were attacking the colony vessel had been hiding in the sensor shadow of the desolate planet, obviously waiting. When it arrived, they had sent a small scout vessel, most likely to determine how powerful their enemy's defenses were. The colony ship had promptly vaporized it.

This in turn, provoked the warships to swarm out of their hiding place like bees out of a bee hive, plasma cannons blazing.

The colony ship's main weapon, a large cannon of sorts, might have been able to disable a few more of its attackers, but the boarding parties that the warships had sent aboard had apparently disabled it. The cannon fell silent after immobilizing the fourth warship.

During the uproar, Guan detected a power spike in the colony ship and had used his bio scanner to get a view of what was happening. Apparently they had unfrozen a warrior from a cryo-tube; a _Super-Ooman_.

He wondered briefly if this wasn't actually a colony ship, but a warship in disguise: that would explain the large amounts of soldiers, vehicles, and weapons it was carrying; things that would be useful for waging war. It _was_ considerably small compared to its oppressors, and wasn't to be considered a heavily armed vessel; but that didn't matter.

He filed this thought away and watched as the soldier made his way to the control deck of the colony ship, spoke briefly with the commanding officer, then fought his way through party after party of enemy soldiers on his way to an escape pod. Guan was truly impressed; this Ooman fought as well as a young-blood class Yautja, or maybe even better.

Guan's insatiable curiosity and thirst for the hunt drew him to the _Ooman_. _'I must investigate this'_. Guan powered up his ship's engines and laid in a landing course that would be near to the _Ooman's_ _craft. It would be a good hunt.

The Ooman's head would make a worthy trophy.

2. Vieled Executioner

****Veiled Executioner****

"Chief! Chief, can you hear me?" the voice quarried urgently. The Chief's eyes opened; he was staring at the lifeboat ceiling. He sat up and leaned on one of the vacant seats next to him, attempting to regain his bearings.

"At last." she exclaimed. "Are you alright, can you move?"

"I'm fine, Cortana." he responded, slowly getting to his feet. His head ached; he must have banged it on a bulkhead during the crash. That would also explain why he had been knocked unconscious.

"The others," said Cortana sadly, "the impact; there's nothing we can do."

It appeared that the Chief was the only one to have survived. He wasn't even expecting to live, himself, especially after the airbrakes were torn off the pod when they had passed through the ring's atmosphere. '_Those_ _genetic enhancements must be doing me more good than I thought'_ . He walked toward the front of the pod and checked the pilot to see if she was still alive; she was gone. He assumed that being at the point of impact would've provided her with a quick, painless death.

'_It was the least she deserved.'_ he thought in mourning and hatred â€" mourning for all those who had already been, and who will be lost, and hatred for those who caused this turmoil: the Covenant.

He proceeded to check the others. There was one, another female, on whom he had found a pulse. Her sweet, pale face was bloodied and bruised from the landing.

"Hey," he said to her "wake up." He softly placed his large hand on her shoulder and gently shook her.

"I don't believe it." Cortana mused to herself, "She's alive." She stirred a bit and pressed her hand against her neck as she groaned quietly.

"What happened?" she asked the Chief, a bit disoriented.

"We crashed." he said bluntly. The marine sighed.

"Thanks for the update." she said sarcastically as she rose to her feet. She was a bit dizzy due to her injuries, and braced herself on the Chief. "I'm Private Foster by the way, sir." she said. She looked out the cockpit window and focused her sight, noticing that they were a mere three or four meters away from the edge of a cliff. Though she looked relieved that they landed when they did, the cliff was the least of her concerns as she remembered her fellow passengers.

"Are they alright?" she asked the Chief in a concerned tone.

"I'm not sure." the Chief said. He reached over to the others and felt for their pulses. He had been positive that absolutely nobody but himself could have survived such an impact, but with a small strand of hope still clinging, he checked each and every marine. To his surprise and relief, he found a pulse on one other marine - the same one whom he had earlier recovered on the _Pillar of Autumn_ at the entrance of the lifeboat.

"He's alive." the Chief said.

"Marine, marine." said Foster.

"Are you alright?" the Chief asked him.

Like the pilot, the marine also pressed one hand against his neck, and the other against his head. He looked up at the Chief.

"Private Raymore, sir." he paused. "Did any of the others make it?" he asked, looking to see three of his lifeless comrades fastened to the wall and the other three strewn on the ground outside of the pod.

"No," the Chief stated dryly "we're the only ones." He looked to the two marines.

"We need to get out of here. The Covenant are going to be looking for us."

"Good idea, sir." Foster said.

Raymore was stunned; looking at his deceased comrades, he couldn't figure out why he was still there. The look on his face was of utter fear and hopelessness. 'It's not fair.' he thought 'This can't be happening.' The Chief once again put his hand on the marine's shoulder.

"I know how you feel." he said, as if he could hear Raymore's thoughts, "But you know what they say: 'Revenge is a dish best served cold.' Now let's get out of here, or it won't be served at all."

The two battered marines were forced to limp out as quickly as they could physically drive themselves, but not before retrieving weapons for themselves from the weapons locker aboard the lifeboat. As they made their way out, two Covenant banshee fighters whirred by, overhead; that was certainly not a good sign.

"They're scouting the area; they must know we're here." Cortana said.

The Covenant knew about the Chief; he was the last of his kind, as far as anyone knew - he was all that remained the Spartan II program. The other Spartans had been destroyed along with Reach, the UNSC's (United Nations Space Command) prime colony and naval base.

The Spartan II program was an attempt by the UNSC to defend against their new enemy who called themselves "The Covenant": an assembly of species who were engaged in a religious war against the "infidels", and were bent on destroying humanity.

Earth's new weapon was an effective fighting tool against Covenant forces, and if they were able to create enough of them, they could deploy them against the Covenant and the tide of the war could have eventually turned for the better.

But The Covenant launched a massive preemptive strike against Reach using hundreds of ships. Their immense fleet caused utter devastation - thousands of lives were lost and much of the UNSC's fleet was reduced to debris. The war seemed to be a lost cause, and that didn't seem to be changing much.

"I'm detecting multiple Covenant drop ships on approach." said Cortana "I recommend moving into those hills. If we're lucky, the Covenant will believe that everyone aboard this life boat died in the crash."

The Chief had to think fast. He knew that if they found him, then they'd find Cortana: the Pillar of Autumn's AI construct. And he knew that if they captured her, then they'd learn everything: force deployment, weapons research, Earth. He had to keep her safe from the enemy - that was his mission.

"I recommend moving into those hills." suggested Cortana "If we're lucky, the Covenant will believe that everyone aboard this lifeboat died in the crash." The Chief looked over to the left and pointed to several boulders that were on the other side of a nearby river.

"Behind those rocks," he said, "hurry!"

The two limped across the bridge that was between them and the opposite bank, while the Chief took up the rear. As they glanced below, they saw that the river led to a roaring waterfall which plummeted down, all the way to the foot of the massive cliff.

Soon after they took cover behind the rocks, they heard the sound of the Covenant drop ships engines as it approached their position. It swiftly droned by and stopped near the derelict lifeboat. The Chief glanced around the rock and saw the drop ship come into a low hover above the ground. He also observed two Covenant elites come out of the side openings of the drop ship. They were both taller than the Chief and were broad-shouldered; they each had four mandibles, all lined with razor sharp teeth.

After them followed six grunts, all short and stubby, wearing masks with tubes leading into methane tanks on their backs so that they could breathe. Then three Jackals jumped out, their dark scales glistening in the sunlight. All of them carried plasma weapons.

The Chief returned to the safety of the rocks and looked at the two other marines.

"Stay as quiet as you can, and don't move" he said to his nervous companions. "They might not notice us."

They were too breathless to speak, but they each gave the Chief a stare of acknowledgment as they brought their weapons to bear - the Lieutenant, her assault rifle, and Raymore, his sniper rifle. The Chief wanted to stay as covert as possible, so he chose Raymore to use his sniper and take out the Covenant soldiers, one by one.

"Work your way down, Private. Take the elites first."

"No problem, Chief." Raymore responded. He lifted the sniper scope to his eye; the Chief slid over to the side and peered around the right side of the large boulder. He got a perfect view of the group of Covenant, via the scope in his helmet's visor.

"Zoom in on the ultra." said the Chief.

Raymore peered through the lens and set it to full magnification; he had a perfect shot at the head of the elite clad in polished silver armor. He awaited the order from the Chief to fire.

The Chief was about to give that order when suddenly the unsuspecting Ultra was fiercely jerked into the air, two blood dripping blades penetrating all the way through his torso.

The ultra let out a loud growl of pain just before he went limp, still skewered on the two sharp, jagged edges. When the Chief looked past the elite, he could see no one behind it; however, he was picking up an extra blip on his motion tracker as the elite was

thrown in the direction of the lifeboat.

The team of Covenant soldiers looked at to their fallen leader in shock. The grunts in the team began to panic; one of them began to go wild, and the others followed suit. The second elite of the major rank, the one dressed in smooth maroon armor, withdrew a second plasma rifle to accompany his first one. The Jackals activated their energy shields and ducked behind them to protect themselves.

As the three marines observed these proceedings, the maroon elite discharged several bolts of plasma from his two rifles in the direction of his deceased comrade. From what the Chief could tell, the elite had hit something but they still couldn't see it. The jackals all began to fire in the same direction, but they hit nothing; apparently, whatever was there wasn't there anymore.

Without a warning, a grunt collapsed to the ground in two pieces, its innards splaying onto the ground. The grunts began to scream wildly and the elite turned and fired again, this time hitting the unknown attacker several times before it relocated. As it moved, the Chief, with his keen sense of sight, saw a faint distortion rippling through the air. _'It must be using some sort of cloaking technology or camouflage'_ , he thought.

The Elite obviously saw the distortion too, because he had trained his weapons onto it and continued firing. The distortion was struck several more times before lancing toward the Elite and severing his head from his body. The Elite's head tumbled into the congregated grunts; they began acting more wildly than before.

One ran over to the cliff and stopped at the edge. The distortion moved towards the fear stricken grunt, picked it up off the ground and, from what the Chief could tell, crushed its head with a single hand.

The jackal closest to the attacker charged his plasma pistol and released a bright flare of plasma. The green bolt struck the back of the intruder and caused it to release the grunt. The grunt was more than likely dead, and if it wasn't, it would be when it reached the end of its terrible fall to the foot of the cliff.

The rest of the Covenant began to discharge their weapons at the invisible creature. But it leapt into the air, evading each shot fired and landed amongst the baffled Covenant. It sliced at the jackals, piercing through their shields into their bodies. The grunts attempted to escape, but their stubby, little legs could not carry them fast enough; they were soon impaled, each and every one by the two long blades.

Soon, all but one ominous signature had disappeared from the Chief's motion tracker; he looked at his companions.

"We need to get out of here." he said to them urgently.

"Now!" added Cortana. By the look on their faces, the Chief could tell they were all in agreement. They scrambled up the boulders and jumped to the ground. They began to shuffle up the hill that bordered the side of the river, the Chief slowed himself to keep the pace with them. But they were going as fast as their legs could carry

them.

The Chief detected five bodies moving up ahead; he also noticed another that was following them; it was a mere twenty or thirty meters behind them.

"In order to cross that distance in that time, that thing must be going fast." Cortana observed jarringly "â€|very fast."

They were approaching several boulders all about a meter apart; the Chief was ready for an ambush. Just then, several elites appeared from behind the rocks, and began to assault the disoriented marines. The Chief needed to get through; he'd rather run through ten groups of Covenant than have to face whatever they saw, or didn't see, back at the lifeboat.

He switched his assault rifle into his left hand and drew his pistol with his right; he then ensued to blast one of the elites to the ground. The other two marines managed to make their way through while the Chief preoccupied the Covenant soldiers, though Foster had received plasma burns from one of the Covenant weapons.

The Chief hoped that whatever it was that was following them would stop to deal with Covenant. If what happened back at the bridge was a display of it's favorite past time, then there was a good chance that it would be distracted long enough to allow the Chief to locate any survivors from the Pillar of Autumn and call for pick-up.

The Chief checked his motion tracker once more - the intruder stopped.

'Those unfortunate souls.'

Guan'De stopped in his tracks. The Oomans had indeed fought their way through the party of aliens at the top of the slope, just as he had predicted.

Guan assumed that his gory display at the Ooman's desolate escape pod had frightened them off.

'So much the better.' It would make the hunt more challenging. He loved striking fear into the heart of his prey; it was like adding seasoning to meat.

But though he was eagerly anticipating the chase, it could wait till he had slaughtered these few aliens.

Guan retracted his wrist blades and reached behind his back; he withdrew his combi-staff from its sheath and extended the two ends of it to their full lengths. He spun it into a comfortable combat position in his grip and he deactivated his stealth device, making himself visible to his prey.

They all jerked their heads towards him. The grunts backed away, as if a wave of fright had radiated from Guan when his presence became evident. The jackals also recognized his superiority, knowing that they stood no chance against this foe.

The two remaining warriors fearlessly strode forward, confident in their abilities to kill this aggressor; they both were outfitted in

glassy blue armor. Guan assumed that these two were of a lower rank, but he was sure not to underestimate them, for even one of these warriors could turn out to be a fearsome foe.

Guan roared a challenge to the two aliens. They responded with similar, vicious growls which echoed off of the rock walls looming around them.

Guan motioned with his hand for them to come to him. They keenly rushed him, but he was prepared for this long before. Guan swiftly detached a silver shuriken from his belt and flung it towards the nearest one.

The shuriken passed through the alien's body, instantly separating his upper half from his lower, killing him; and like a boomerang, the shuriken returned back to Guan, passing through the second one, dividing him as well. The green grass was now stained dark purple with the blood of the two fallen warriors.

Not long after Guan mercilessly slaughtered the pitiful grunt soldiers, those two alien fighters that had been scouting the area earlier had returned. They had immediately spotted Guan and were closing in on him fast.

Their forward fuselages each had two built in plasma cannons with a lethal fuel-rod cannon in between them; this cannon released a large, neon green ball of destructive energy directly at Guan. He leapt out of the way just in time; he could feel the heat of the explosion blow against him as he landed some distance from where he had just been standing.

The second fighter began to spray the ground using its plasma cannons, attempting to hit Guan. The only weapon Guan could think to use was his own self. He didn't want to risk damaging any of his weapons.

Guan dug his large feet into the soil and awaited the purple crafts to come in for another pass. Once again, they attempted to pelt Guan with their plasma cannons, but with his speed and agility, he eluded them.

But as they passed, Guan leaped from the ground and grabbed the left wing of the lead fighter and swung himself atop it.

The fighter started to bank to the left because of Guan's substantial weight, so he quickly crept back to the cramped entrance of the cockpit in the rear side of the relatively small craft where he saw the alien pilot laying face down, inside the fuselage attempting to keep his ship from broad-siding the cliff side.

Guan reached inside and pulled the distraught pilot from the cockpit and threw him to his death on the ground below.

Guan quickly squeezed himself far enough into the craft to pilot it. He soon got a visual of the other perplexed pilot and his fighter, and he turned the craft towards it. Without warning, Guan left the controls and leapt onto the wing closest to the rock wall and extended his wrist blades. He jumped.

Behind him, he heard the two vehicles crash into each other causing a

large explosion that propelled shrapnel in all directions.

Guan flew through the air towards the cliff side and rammed his wrist blades into the stone, stopping himself from plummeting to either serious, bone breaking injuries, or death. And there he was hanging, not exactly sure how to get down.

'_Not quite what I had in mindâ€|'_

3. Truth and Reconciliation

****Truth and Reconciliation****

"Alright," said Cortana, "that's the last of them."

The Chief stepped out of the driver's seat of the warthog after driving for nearly an hour, going from crash site to crash site, locating stranded marines and their lifeboats. Much of the _Pillar of Autumn's_ crew had made it to the ring's surface; much more than Cortana had predicted.

The Covenant cruisers had dispatched hundreds of drop ships to the landing sites to eliminate or capture the humans. But with the Chief's prompt assistance, a couple dozen marines were spared the Covenant's wrath. There had been hundreds of life pods that were ejected from the _Autumn,_ but the Chief wasn't capable of rescuing them all; they were scattered all over this ring world. Somewhere on the ring, some of the _Pillar of Autumn's_ command crew had already gathered together and set up a base of operations, and a Pelican transport craft was sent to retrieve the Chief and his party.

He walked around the front of the warthog and approached the passenger seat of the vehicle; a dark skinned man in a green uniform hopped out, assault rifle in hand and waved to Raymore.

"Get down off of there, Private," the man said. "We've got to go butcher some more of those Covenant suckers!"

Raymore loosened his grip from the machine gun turret which was mounted on back of the warthog; the triple barrels of the mini gun turret were still smoking from recent combat.

"Yes sir, Sergeant." Raymore answered. He hastily leaped from the back of the vehicle.

The Chief approached the Sergeant.

"Johnson, tell the rest of the men that Foe Hammer is on her way."

"You got it Chief!"

Johnson detached his communicator from his belt and activated it.

"Marines," shouted Johnson, "we're gettin' out of here! Foe Hammer's coming in."

As the five marines made their way out from the large, jumbled maze

of boulders that were splayed across a nearby hill where they had been taking refuge, the hum of Echo 419's pelican engines could be heard overhead.

"New traffic on the Covenant battle net:" stated Cortana, "I've found Captain Keyes! He's being held on a Covenant cruiser: the _Truth and Reconciliation_ - a ship I disabled before we abandoned the _Autumn_. The _Truth and Reconciliation_ touched down on a desert plateau roughly three hundred kilometers up spin."

Soon after, the Pelican began to drop down several meters away from the gathered marines; it came into a low hover above the ground.

"There's our ride." said Cortana. "Get aboard and let's get out of here."

They all ran for it and leaped up into the rear compartment where Lieutenant Foster had been waiting ever since she had been injured. The Chief and Johnson were the last ones to enter the transport.

"Welcome aboard Master Chief." said Foe Hammer "Ready for dust off."

"We should move out, Lieutenant;" Cortana said to her, "and then we'll need your help on a rescue mission."

"Glad to be of service, Cortana."

Foe Hammer maneuvered the Pelican through the night, into a landing position, just out of site of the Covenant forces that were blocking them from their objective: The _Truth and Reconciliation_.

The marines inside the transport locked and loaded their weapons and prepared to engage the Covenant troops; they were all just waiting to appease their itchy trigger fingers. The Chief chose Raymore and Foster: the two marines who had been with him on the lifeboat; he was familiar with them and they were determined and skillful soldiers. Johnson chose several: Dubbo, Jenkins, Mendoza and Stacker. There were two other marines accompanying them.

"The enemy has captured Captain Keyes," said Cortana to the marines in the pelican, "and are holding him aboard one of their cruisers: The _Truth and Reconciliation_."

The ship is currently holding position approximately three hundred meters above the other end of this plateau."

"So how do we get inside the ship if it's in the air," asked Dubbo, "The Corp issued me a rifle, not wings."

"There's a gravity lift that ferries troops and supplies between the ship and the surface," Johnson replied, "that's our ticket in."

"Once we get inside the ship I should be able to lock on to the tracking signal from Captain Keyes' neural implants," Cortana informed them.

Echo 419 stopped as its thrusters swiveled on their hinges and aimed downward towards the ground. Foe Hammer slowly brought the craft down. The marines piled out by twos.

"Hit it Marines, go, go, go!" yelled Johnson, "The Corp ain't payin' us by the hour!"

Every marine ran for the small canyon path that led into a clearing: a clearing that the Covenant had posted at least a dozen soldiers and a couple of plasma turrets inside of to guard the path to the grav-lift platform.

"Stick to the higher ground to the right," Cortana suggested, "we should be able to recon the Covenant position without being spotted."

The Chief did as he was told and crept up the high path that ran along the side of the clearing, above the unsuspecting Covenant. He zoomed in with his visor and activated his night vision observing several elites who were patrolling back and forth, four or five grunts who were standing by at the plasma turrets and four jackals who formed a defensive perimeter near the entrance to the clearing.

"I've detected Covenant stationary guns near the next pass," Cortana cautioned. "I recommend using your sniper rifle to take out the gunners while I call for marine support."

The Chief set his pistol in his holster and pulled the sniper rifle strapped on his back around into his grasp. Cortana continued.

"Get ready to move in to support us, Sergeant," Cortana exacted, "the Master Chief is going to covertly take out as many of the Covenant as he can; don't open fire until you hear the enemy return fire on us. That should let us keep the element of surprise."

"I'm standin' by Cortana," said Johnson in his usual, confident tone yet keeping it low.

The Chief motioned to Raymore and indicated that he wanted him positioned a bit further down the high path; he had Foster take up the further end.

Everything was in place; the Chief situated himself behind a thick bush that was scraping against a rock which provided him with perfect cover from sight. He lifted his sniper rifle and placed the stock into his left hand.

Placing the barrel through the bush, he used the scope to zoom in on the strategically placed jackals. It'd take a whole clip of sniper rifle ammunition to penetrate a jackal's energy shield, but luckily the Chief had flank.

He sited in on the closest jackal and fired. It was a direct hit and the bullet traveled directly through the sides of all four jackals; they hit the ground dead.

A Covenant elite popped out from behind a rock and fired up at the ledge from which the Chief was sniping. The Chief's shields were nearly lowered by the time he had time to take cover behind the

boulder, due to the incredible accuracy of the elite. But his accuracy was no match for Foster's efficiency as she immediately popped out from her cover and shot the elite in the head.

The Chief mentally activated the communicator in his helmet.

"Johnson," he said, "move in!"

"We're on our way. Chief," Johnson replied!

It didn't take long for the marines to mow down every Covenant soldier and regroup. There had been no casualties or severe injuries besides Raymore; he had been jumped by an elite and was injured after Johnson and his men had rushed the Covenant. He was lucky to have Lieutenant Foster for a "bodyguard"; otherwise the elite would've mangled him.

Cortana called for Echo 419 to send in paramedics to come take Raymore back to the Pelican.

As the medics placed Raymore on the stretcher the Chief walked up to him.

"It's alright marine," the he said, "you'll get'em next time."

Raymore looked disappointed and angry at himself.

"If you say so Chief," he responded in pain. Foster approached the stretcher and gave Raymore a friendly smirk.

"You'd better take better care of yourself, Private," she said jokingly. "I can't always be taking care of you."

"You know," he chuckled in pain, "you'd make a wonderful nurse." She gently patted him on the shoulder then she and the Chief rejoined the other marines.

The medics carried Raymore away and loaded him onto the transport. The Chief turned to the remaining marines.

"Let's not keep the Covenant waiting."

Guan'de's ship touched down at the same place the _Ooman's_ had, soon after it had departed from the _Ooman_ infiltration team. He rotated his chair and faced the right hand console so that he could unveil his unique hunting gear that was hidden behind a bulkhead. This was a unique hunt.

'Few Yautja ever get the opportunity to hunt an opponent of equal skill' , he thought to himself with pride. This was the turning point in his life so he was employing his finest equipment. He knew that he could not keep his presence hidden from such an intelligent prey, but he had to stay concealed as long as he possibly could; he needed to know his Prey.

Above most things, he wished to avoid any more delays like the one he experienced back at the cliffs. Though he made it down, it took too much precious time that he could've used to hunt his main prey. He

had decided upon no more detours, for fear of once again losing sight of the main objective.

Guan stood and walked over to the newly revealed compartment behind the wall and marveled at his martial expertise.

Guan was soon clad with an intimidating ensemble; it was black from head to toe. His mask was of his own design, and was made to be terrifying, especially with his thick, dark dreadlocks protruded over his shoulders. His outer body mesh was a net of solid wires that covered his entire body; this was enclosed in black shoulder and chest armor that was treated to endure most forms of ruining, including acid.

He was still using his old wrist blades; the very ones he used with which to kill his first Xenomorph eighty years earlier, though they had been cleaned and polished many times since then. It was fortunate for him that the blades were also immune to his reckless brutality, such as jamming them into cliffs and rocks and such.

He had a plasma caster which he had mounted on his shoulder; he had laid a black coat of paint over its original gray color so that it would fit with his sinister outfit.

Over his back was slung his custom forged combi-staff, which, when extended to its full length, was over two meters long and exceptionally deadly. And on his belt was fastened three (also custom forged) shurikens, a spear-gun, and his ceremonial dagger which was presented to him by his mentor when he was still of the Unblooded Class, many years earlier.

Guan was loaded and ready. He walked towards the rear of the vessel and opened the hatch. The rear section of the ship opened and the bulkhead lowered down to act as a ramp. Guan activated his portable stealth device and he was instantly invisible, only detectable by motion. He quickly strode across the ramp and sprinted towards the same path that the _Ooman_ soldiers had taken. As the hatch closed behind him, Guan muttered to himself, "M-di H'dlak".

'Fear is not an alternative.'

The Chief hurled a frag-grenade into the large group of Covenant soldiers that was posted out in the clearing that was ahead. By the time they saw him, they had been blasted into the air by the explosion; the Covenant were in utter confusion as to what was happening. The marines piled into the clearing and confronted the last three elites; they were all of the "major" class, which was perceptible because of their maroon armor. They would've given the marines more than they could chew had the Chief not been there. The fight commenced.

Foster quickly sniped the grunts that would've been operating the three plasma turrets which were positioned around the area.

"Bring it on, baby!" yelled Johnson as he rushed one of the elites. He took his assault rifle and brutally shoved it into the Elite's chest. The Major stumbled back only slightly; he then rose to his full height. He towered at least two feet over Johnson; with both of his three fingered hands, the Elite seized the Sergeant by the uniform and lifted him into the air, intending to throw him against a

nearby boulder.

The Chief had just finished dispatching the other two when he turned and sprayed the elite in the back with several bursts of his assault rifle ammo, only to ricochet them off of the elite's shields. The elite released Johnson and turned to face the Chief. Johnson quickly recovered his posture and bashed his rifle over the elite's head, breaking the weapon. The elite collapsed.

"That's right, you mother scratchin' alien. Try and get up! Try!"

"Common, Sarge." said Mendoza. "Let him get up so I can kill him again." he joked in his slight Mexican accent.

Cortana called for Foe Hammer to bring in the reinforcements, for they had reached the gravity lift which was directly beneath the _Truth and Reconciliation _and would require greater forces to infiltrate the vessel.

The surface platform was linked to the ship by a shimmering, cylindrical shaft of purple light. The shaft shone directly onto the pad at the surface.

"Cortana to Echo 419: we've reached the gravity lift and are ready for reinforcements."

"Copy that Cortana." Foe Hammer responded, "Hold tight, gentlemen."

Foster cleared her throat loudly over the comm. so that Foe Hammer could hear her. There was a momentary pause.

"Sorry about that Lieutenant." Foe Hammer said, "Foe Hammer out."

"Once we're inside the ship, I can home in on the Captain's command neural interface." Cortana informed the marines, "He'll probably be in or near the ship's brig, which should narrow our search."

Foe Hammer flew her Pelican over the plateau, circled the gravity lift and came in for a landing.

"Echo 419, inbound," said Foe Hammer. "Clear the drop zone."

The transport dropped off seven fresh marines about ten meters from the lift; they approached the landing platform.

"Marines," said Cortana, "prepare for boarding action!"

They were all hesitant to step into the purple stream that emanated from the bottom side of the massive battle cruiser hovering far above their heads. The Chief decided to start a trend. He stepped onto the platform, into the stream and stood at the center of the platform. Several seconds passed and he suddenly started to feel weightless. His feet were lifted slightly off of the platform; soon he was speedily flying upward towards the _Truth and Reconciliation_, feeling as if he were swallowing his own stomach.

He would soon be in the Covenant ship

_ 'I hope they followed me.' _

4. Retrieval

****Retrieval****

His speed was readily increasing as he was propelled towards the ventral side of the Truth and Reconciliation. He thought that he might actually be smashed into the hard metallic hull; but as he came near to the ship's bottom, a circular door above him slid open and the gravity lift pulled him through the opening.

The Chief halted midair in a large room. He hovered above the floor for a few seconds as the remaining twelve marines shot up from the surface. As the Chief would've guessed, Johnson was the first of them; the rest followed. After they had all been lifted into the cruiser, the gravity generator deactivated and gently lowered all thirteen marines onto the floor. They raised their weapons and scanned the area with their eyes.

"We're in." sad Cortana. "I've got a good lock on the Captain's CNI Transponder. No Covenant defenses detected."

"That doesn't mean they're not here." said the Chief. He looked towards Johnson and motioned to him with his hand. Johnson nodded.

"Fall out," Johnson ordered, "double time!"

The marines formed a circle in the center of the room. They all searched, looking for signs of Covenant presence; none was evident. The Chief and Johnson broke formation and walked around, searching behind cover and in the shadows - anywhere that could conceal the enemy.

"What? There's no Covenant here?" said Mendoza, "Think maybe nobody's home."

The Chief and Johnson nosed around a bit more; they both seemed satisfied.

"We're clear." said the Chief.

"Fall out," shouted Johnson!

The marines stood and walked around, trying to find an exit from the room. All of the doors were locked. They couldn't find any way out.

"We may have to make our own way Chief," said Johnson.

The Chief saw something on his motion tracker, then another; soon there were at least a dozen blips moving toward the marine's position, and fast.

"We've got contacts," alerted the Chief, "lots of contacts."

The Chief could sense the marine's tension rise; he looked every

which way trying to identify the door that they would come through first. The door behind them hissed open; they turned only to see nothing. The door closed.

Another door opened to the left, but still nothing; that door closed. The Chief still saw the objects on his tracker coming closer and closer; they were right on top of them.

The Chief tightly gripped the stock of his assault rifle; he pulled the trigger.

"Fire!"

The marines began shooting in all directions; their bullets were ricocheting off the walls and floor. They also illuminated four Covenant elites, who were all dressed in suits of light blue armor: infiltrators. One of them was directly in front of the Chief; he promptly beat the elite over the head with the butt of his rifle.

After being aggravated by the marine's deadly weapons fire, the elites stood back, withdrawing from their belts small handles.

The one facing the Chief lowered his hand down to his waist and activated the device. From the handle emanated a bright, shimmering, two pronged blade, nearly a meter in length. The glows of their swords were enough to brightly light the large cargo bay.

All four of the Sangheili dropped to their attack stances, their loud roars echoing off the walls and ceiling.

The one in front of the Chief lunged and swung at his head speedily with the deadly blade. The Chief anticipated this and quickly ducked, spun around and elbowed the elite in the gut. This caused the elite to drop his energy sword to the ground and fall back slightly. The warrior was only stunned for a second when he re-gained composure; but the Chief had already recovered the Infiltrator's sword and effectively sliced off his head.

"'No Covenant'!" Stacker quoted Mendoza "You had to open your mouth!"

The Chief looked back to see six additional dead bodies strewn around the room; only three were elites.

"That was way too close, Chief." complained Cortana.

The Spartan paid no attention to her as he counted how many marines were left. All of the original marines were still alive, but three of the novice ones had been killed by the elites. This would make it that much harder to reach the brig and Captain Keyes. The marines gathered in the center of the room and reloaded their weapons.

"Area secure, sir." reported Stacker, "But we'd better keep moving."

"What happened to all of those contacts, Chief?" Foster asked.

The Chief checked his motion tracker. The reinforcements had apparently left after the infiltrators had been eliminated.

"They're gone." the Chief answered.

"Just gone?" she asked.

"Yeah, just gone."

"Most likely because they're too darn chicken to come out!" Johnson stated.

"We need to find a way out, Chief." said Cortana. Mendoza pointed to the door near Stacker.

"How about that door?" he asked.

Stacker turned to the door and began tapping on the control console next to it. He let out a sigh of frustration. He had been attempting to access the servos for each door, but each time he tried it denied him access.

"The door's locked, sir." Stacker said with a sigh. "I can't bypass it. We can't get through here."

The other marines were also developing mild cases of frustration just thinking about their current situation.

The Chief walked over toward the direction that the elites had come from. He figured that the elites probably had forgotten to lock the doors behind them. Sure enough, when he stood in front of the door, it slid open.

When it separated, it revealed a large, dark corridor. The Chief motioned to the marines.

"Over here." The marines jogged to the Chief position and gazed into the corridor in uncertainty; there may have been more Covenant awaiting them in the shadows. The Chief fearlessly stepped out of the bay, into the corridor; Johnson followed after, almost as fearlessly. No other presence seemed evident in the dark space other than the Chief, Johnson and the hesitant marines.

"All clear." said the Chief.

The party moved on through the door way and down the inclined walk way. They rounded the corner and there before them stood yet another door. The edifice stood at least three meters tall.

"I don't believe this." said Cortana with an annoyed attitude.

"The Covenant sure do like their doors." said Stacker with the same attitude. Johnson yelled to Stacker.

"Stacker, open that door!"

The marine approached the controls and tried to bypass the security codes for the door. His efforts did no good.

"Sorry, Sarge." said Stacker, "I can't bypass it, we can't get through here."

"Don't be so sure," said the Chief, looking at Johnson. Johnson smiled, knowing exactly what was going through the Chief mind. Johnson turned to Dubbo, his demolitionist.

"Dubbo," Johnson said, "blow that door."

"You got it, sir!"

Dubbo unhooked his pack and set it on the floor. He opened it and pulled out a small device about as big around as his hand and stuck it on the face of the door; it was a satchel charge.

"How many Covenant are on the other side," asked Mendoza?

"I'm detecting at least twenty life signs in the next room." Cortana replied.

"Did you hear that, everyone?" asked Johnson. "Ya'll better get ready for some butt-kickin' action, because you're about to get it!"

Dubbo activated the remote receiver to the appropriate frequency and set the yield to medium. Johnson had the marines stand back, away from the door.

"Ya'll better stand back now," ordered Johnson, "or this door's gonna' be your last meal!"

The marines stepped back as far as possible, crouched down and covered themselves. The Chief and Dubbo quickly rejoined their comrades and also crouched down. Dubbo withdrew a remote detonator from his pocket and held it in his gloved hand; he pressed the big red button.

It was as if some fool had opened the door to the bottomless pit and released a legion of savage demons, only the bottomless pit was a satchel charge and the savage demons a platoon of marines. Though their ferocity and battle cries were not nearly as wild as an angered monster, they still proved more than enough to put fear into their enemies.

The shrapnel which used to be the door scattered towards the Covenant that were nearby and cut them to ribbons. The marines all ran through the smoke, guns roaring, mercilessly pelting the feeble grunts who were hopelessly trying to find cover. The Chief shot at the Covenant who had taken cover behind the energy barricades

The marine's bullets reflected off the barricades and weren't able to reach the enemy. So the Chief withdrew a grenade from his belt and tightly gripped it in his hand, careful not to drop it. With careful aim, he threw the grenade toward the ground; it skipped across the distance that separated the marines from the Covenant and stopped.

The Covenant were too distracted by the marine's weapons fire to notice the deadly package that had been delivered.

There was nothing in sight. The _Ooman's_ had been efficient in taking out the other aliens, as could be told by the colorful display of aliens all over the battlefield.

_ 'Why don't these Ooman's take trophies from their prey?' _

Guan was puzzled as to why they would create such a superior soldier yet not use him for hunting purposes; but he couldn't be distracted by irrelevant facts. This was a hunt. The hunt of a lifetime.

Guan approached the gravity lift that the _Oomans_ had used to infiltrate the alien craft which he could hear humming hundreds of meters above his head.

_ 'Wherever my prey leads, I will follow.' _

Guan walked up the slanted side of the landing platform, proceeding to enter into the shimmering beam of light that he knew would bring him into the ship.

He began to experience himself being lifted into the air. Soon he was as light as a feather, being shot upward towards the alien vessel.

He had reached the end of his short journey. As he approached the vessel, the door above him opened and the gravity lift ferried him into a large space with an even more colorful display of aliens.

He sniffed around, making sure that he was the only one there; he smelled nothing. He shifted through his different visual modes: infrared, ultraviolet, heat imaging, low-light amplification, and motion detection; he saw nothing. The room was lifeless.

Guan began the task of tracking the path that his prey took. There were many passages that led out of the room, but there was only one that led to the _Ooman_. It was obvious that none of the doors had been forced; so he would check for a door servo that had been bypassed. After he surveyed each door, he found only one that could've been used. The door slid open, allowing Guan transit into a dark passage; everything was tranquil and still, so much so that he could hear the droning within the bowels of the alien vessel.

When he rounded the corner at the end of the corridor, he was faced by a door with a gaping hole with jagged and charred edges. It was apparent that his prey had used an explosive device to blast through the door.

Guan began to wonder why they would want to board an enemy vessel.

_ 'What is the purpose?' _

But he quickly regained himself, realizing that he was once again losing sight of his goal. What his prey is doing and why he's doing it must not interfere with the hunt.

Guan stepped through the opening, wafting the fresh smoke away with his hand. As he always did, he searched for signs of another presence, but yet again found none. Guan considered that these aliens realized as much as he did that this _Ooman_ was out of the ordinary; they must've had previous encounters with him.

He mused to himself as to where his prey was now. The corridors of this vessel were not the ideal hunting ground; it was harder to

detect motion, heat, and sound. All the senses Guan usually relied on were now slightly dampened. But he would have to make due.

He was trained for hunting with limitations. He would have to use the clues that his Prey had so graciously left him. Guan had the feeling even if he were on the ideal hunting ground, this Prey would still be elusive.

It was times these that Guan disliked. He had never liked the idea of technology playing a major role in the hunt, for it made one seem too dependent on something other than his own abilities. But Guan wasn't going to risk losing his Prey now; he was so close.

The door to the brig slid open, but there was nobody there. The Covenant grunts sniffed around, looking for the disturbance that had opened the door, but they couldn't see anything.

Suddenly, an explosion rocked the room and the grunts were blown apart; the Chief quickly stepped in and filled the flustered Covenant with lead.

As usual, it didn't take long for the Chief and his men to take care of business.

The Chief spotted a control panel at the back of the brig; he observed that each side had four cells parallel to each other.

The Chief stepped onto the platform at the far end of the room where the panel was located and pressed the button that looked most likely to deactivate the containment fields that trapped the prisoners inside the cells.

The force fields shut off. The marines were assisting the other prisoners while the Chief looked for Keyes. Entering the cell to the far right, the Chief saw him lying on the floor in the corner. He appeared to be exhausted, but the Chief's earsplitting entrance shook him up.

Keyes' half-closed eyes fully opened as the Chief reached down with his hand and pulled the Captain to his feet. Keyes glared at the Chief and sighed.

"Coming here was reckless," he scolded, "you two know better than this." He paused and smiled. "Thanks."

Johnson walked up to the Chief and the Captain, and gave a report.

"We found three of them in the other cells; they all seem to be pretty beat up."

"We'll have to get them all weapons," said the Chief. "Can they walk?"

"I don't know." Johnson looked backed to his men who were assisting the injured, looking for an answer.

Dubbo nodded at the Sergeant.

The Captain walked over to one of the alien corpses and picked up its

weapon. It was a large weapon with a blue stock similar to most Covenant weapons except for one unique characteristic: it had at least two dozen thick pink "needles" erecting out of the top of it. The other three former captives also retrieved Covenant weapons.

Keyes walked to the center of the brig and gathered the marines.

"Marines, lock and load your weapons," he told them, "let's be ready to move."

"Yes, sir," responded Johnson.

"While the Covenant had us locked up in here," he began, "I overheard the guards talking about this ring world. They call it, _'Halo'_."

"One moment, sir," said Cortana, "accessing the Covenant battle net." Cortana paused.

"According to the data in their networks the Ring has some kind of deep religious significance. If I'm analyzing this correctly they believe that _'Halo'_ is some kind of weapon: one with vast, unimaginable power."

"And it's true," added Keyes. "The Covenant kept saying that whoever who controls Halo controls the fate of the universe."

"Now I see," Cortana realized. "I have intercepted a number of messages about a Covenant search team scouting for a control room. I thought they were looking for the bridge of a cruiser that I damaged during the battle above the ring, but they must be looking for _Halo's_ control room."

"That's bad news," said Keyes eerily. "If _Halo_ is a weapon and the Covenant gain control of it, they'll use it against us and wipe out the entire human race."

He looked to the Chief with a grim look on his face. "Chief, Cortana, I have a new mission for you. We need to beat the Covenant to _Halo's_ control room. Once we get out of here, we'll formulate an operation"

"Aye, Captain," Cortana responded.

The Captain lifted the "Needler" and took a deep breath and looked towards the Chief.

"Are we ready?" he asked. The Chief nodded.

"Marines, let's move."

5. Change in Plans

****Change in Plans****

"We made it!" Cortana exclaimed as the Chief broke through the opened doorway pulling the trigger of his rifle. The marines behind him

backed him up as he maneuvered around to flank the enemy.

The grunts ran for their lives after the elite major dropped to the deck, but were chased down by Keyes and Johnson and were shown no mercy.

After leaving the brig, the Chief led his group of marines and navy men to the nearest hangar bay so that Foe Hammer could pick them up. The most important thing on everyone's minds was getting Captain Keyes to a safe place. He was their leader, and without him it would be extremely difficult to coordinate an effective resistance against the Covenant. Such a resistance could also give them better opportunity to find out more information about this ring world, _Halo._

"Cortana to Echo 419: we have the Captain and need extraction on the double."

"_Negative, Cortana." _replied Foe Hammer._ "I've been engaged by Covenant air patrols and I'm having a tough time shaking 'em. You'll be better off finding your own ride. Sorry_."

"Acknowledged, Foe Hammer. Cortana out."

"Why is it never easy?" remarked Mendoza.

"Because you're behind enemy lines and you're under my command, Soldier!" shouted Johnson.

"Air support is cut off, Captain." said Cortana. "We need to hold here until Foe Hammer can move in."

"Oh man! We're trapped in here." cried Dubbo. "We're screwed! We're screwed, man!"

Keyes stared at Dubbo solemnly.

"Stow the bellyaching, Soldier. Remember, you're a leatherneck."

There were no other Covenant in sight, but the marines did a quick search just to be certain; then they secured the door.

_'Something isn't right here.' _The Chief had been uneasy since before they boarded the ship. He couldn't help but feel on edge; the same feeling he felt after the life-pod crashed on the Ring; when those Covenant soldiers were slaughtered by- _'â€| by something.' _

Keyes walked along the balcony on the second floor that stretched around the entire room, observing a craft that was docked; this gave him the plan he was looking for.

"Cortana, if you and the Chief can get us into one of those Covenant drop ships, I can fly us outta here."

"Yes, Captain." she said. "There's a Covenant drop ship still docked."

The party moved over to the location where the drop ship made contact

with the second floor balcony. The Captain worked at the console for a bit and the door of the craft's side compartment opened.

"Everybody, mount up," ordered Keyes. "Let's get onboard."

As the marines piled into the side compartment, the Chief paused and looked back at the door; there was a sense of uncertainty about him; and throughout this whole operation, there was a thread of vagueness. The Chief's change in disposition was so blatant that Keyes could see it, even through the MJOLNIR armor.

"What's wrong, Chief?" the Captain asked, also looking at the door. The Chief paused momentarily and answered back.

"I don't know."

"Well, let's get out of here." While the Captain made his way into the cockpit, the Chief slowly entered the side compartment with the rest of the marines; his mind was still dwelling on the steadily increasing disturbance. The Captain was now situated in the cockpit and began preparing to take the drop ship out of the hangar bay.

He deactivated the clamps that were holding the ship to the ceiling, activated its engines, and gently lowered it down to where it could hover above the ground.

"That's it." said Cortana. "The drop ship is moving."

Keyes twisted the controls and the drop ship turned and faced the force field that separated the hangar from the outside.

"Give me a minute to interface with the ship's controls." said Cortana who was obviously more confident in her piloting abilities than in Captain Keyes'.

"Ah, no need." Keyes said calmly. "I'll take this bird out myself."

Keyes was about to thrust the control stick forward when a door on the second floor opened revealing two massive creatures. They were hunched over and were almost completely covered in a blue, opaque armor; integrated into their left arms were massive shields and the right arms were well-sized gun barrels.

The monsters' skin was a bright orange color, but they were mostly covered by the armor, leaving only a select few "soft spots" undefended. And to add to their already menacing appearance, there were several lengthy spikes budding out of the backs of their armor. The two behemoths slowly inched their way to the edge of the balcony while remaining crouched.

"Captain, hunters!" warned Cortana.

"Hang on!" said Keyes.

The Captain quickly moved the drop ship forward through the force field, just barely escaping the green projectiles that were distributed by the Hunters who sought to keep the stolen drop ship from escaping.

"It's payback time," Keyes stated. "Let's go find _Halo's_ control center."

Guan leaped through the opened doorway just in time; that is, just in time to see the _Oomans_ escape in their commandeered craft.

"C'jit!" he cursed in anger and irritation. He was so close to his Prey; he was already getting used to following his familiar trail. He had been expecting to finish the hunt and retain his trophy, his glory, and his honor.

But he soon forgot his frustration when he discovered the folly of cursing in mid-hunt, for two large creatures heard him clear as day and began their approach. They appeared to be formidable opponents, heavily armored and well armed. He thoughtfully considered taking his anger out on them. Even though he doubted that they were equivalents to his main Prey, they would have to do for now. The _Ooman_ would undoubtedly be thousands of kilometers away by the time he returned to his ship.

Guan formulated a strategy in his head as to how he would take these beasts: they were covered from head to toe with seemingly impenetrable armor, and had strong offensive power, but they were extremely slow. Even so, the beasts already had him cornered, and his options became limited.

Thinking fast, he withdrew one of his shurikens and threw it towards a distant wall. It brushed up against the steel causing a shower of bright sparks and a loud, metallic shriek. The twin creatures stopped in their tracks and looked where the shuriken had hit the wall. Guan had made a window of opportunity. He deactivated his camouflage.

To give himself more time, Guan did not retrieve the shuriken as it returned, but ran and slid between the giants, halting as he came up behind them.

Guan had no desire to take on either of these monsters in hand to hand combat so he would take one out while he could. He swiftly extended his wrist blades and used his powerful arm to slice into the undefended "soft-spot" on the monster's back, being careful to mind the long spikes protruding out of the monster's back. The two blades slashed through the mushy, orange flesh with ease. The creature died instantly and thudded to the floor. Guan was surprised, and not to mention disappointed that his foe had died so quickly. _'It is no wonder that these beasts are so heavily armored.'_

But as soon as Guan had eliminated his first victim, the other had instantly turned and slammed its heavy shield into Guan, knocking him on the floor. He was astounded that this fiend had been able to pull that off without him noticing.

Guan regained himself just in time to evade another violent swing of the beast's massive shield. He jumped up and onto the wall and pushed off, landing behind the creature. It seemed to anticipate this move and it jerked itself backwards, attempting to impale Guan on its long, sharp barbs.

It missed Guan, but barely. He fell back slightly to give himself

more room so that he could counterattack; he withdrew his combi-staff from its sheath on his back, though he did not extend it. He didn't plan on using it until he had his opponent right where he wanted it.

The creature crept nearer towards Guan, hoping to once again force him into another corner. Guan predicted this tactic, and kept backing off into the corner and released several taunting roars and growls. This didn't seem to confuse his enemy any, for it continued to approach slowly but surely. But without a sign, Guan rushed the creature with all the speed he could muster, and if this behemoth wasn't confused before, it definitely was now. The creature brought its arm up to shoot Guan with its fuel-rod cannon, but he swiftly leaped up onto its arm and bounded into the air.

As Guan flew behind it, he extended his combi-staff to full length and firmly brought it into both of his hands. When he landed, he used all of his strength to thrust the staff into the beast before it could turn. It growled in pain as it stretched back. Life had soon fled the beast and it fell to the floor.

As he wiped the gob of blood off of his wrist blades, he hoped he would not have to inconvenience himself with any more of these creatures in this hunt.

'But perhaps the next.'

6. Further Ambitions

****Further Ambitions****

The Supreme Commander of the Fleet of Particular Justice stood upon the upper deck of the bridge, his golden armor gleaming under the vivid, white lights that lit up the massive command center. The Seeker of Truth, a CCS class Covenant Capital Ship, had been orbiting Halo for the past twenty hours, observing the inferior battle cruisers. More soldiers had been lost than expected during this short span of time, but still these ships were ferrying down more warriors for the battle; they had a strong confidence in successfully exterminating all human presence from the Sacred Ring.

The Sangheili Zealot watched his view screen intently, thinking of how he would be extolled and lauded for his accomplishments here; being the leader of this prominent fleet, he would most definitely be given a promotion from the great Hierarchs themselves. He may even receive another name - one that would bestow upon him marvelous pride and honor. As he averted at what the future could hold in store, an alarm went off at one of the stations on the lower deck.

"Supreme Commander," said an ultra, down near the console, "Commander Orna'Fulsamee of the Truth and Reconciliation requests to speak with you immediately, sir."

"Very well, route him to the main view screen."

Moments later, a holo-image of another elite appeared on the screen. His armor was almost identical to that of the Supreme Commander's, aside from a few obvious rank insignias. "What is it, Commander?" he asked solemnly.

The lesser Zealot hesitated, for the news he was delivering was severe. The Supreme Commander immediately knew that something had gone wrong. The _Truth and Reconciliation's_ commander cleared his throat and began to speak.

"_The commanding officer of the Human ship has escaped." _he said shakily._ "And he did so by using one of our own drop ships."_

The Fleet Commander couldn't believe what he was hearing. _'The one individual who could rally the humans to form an effective resistance against the Covenant has now rejoined his own kind?' _ The prestigious Sangheili veteran sighed at the thought with disappointment as he attempted to hold in his irritation.

"_We sent a pair of Lekgolos to stop them but the cowards esca-"_ The Supreme Commander lifted his hand, indicating that he was finished listening.

"Commander," he began, "I hope you know that when it comes to failures such as this, the Hierarchs aren't very lenient in dealing with them." Fulsamee knew all too well of what the Fleet Commander spoke. "Let us hope that this error does not jeopardize the security of the Sacred Artifact."

The commander lowered his head in shame. _"There's more, sir. Among the humans who performed the rescue operation, there was a human super-soldier. Apparently he had escaped their vessel before it landed on the sacred artifact."_

"A Spartan." the Ship Master muttered to himself. _'I thought they had all been destroyed during the attack upon the human's planet.'_ "Are you certain it was a Spartan?" he asked earnestly.

"_I am certain, sir. Several of the troops we sent aboard the human's vessel reported barely escaping with their lives because of a 'demon' , as they call it, that was rampaging throughout the ship, killing all of our soldiers. The description and data they presented verifies it."_

The fleet commander, for the first time in a while, was beginning to feel worried; worried that if this "Demon" were allowed to roam the sacred artifact freely, and discover its significance and power, he'd use it against the Covenant. _'He must be stopped.'_

"This Demon's actions are a direct violation against the will of the Prophets. His blasphemous actions could very well endanger our Covenant and the reason that we are here - the very reason that we are even alive. We must protect _Halo_ at all costs."

"_Of course, sir."_ the young officer said_. "I will send down more troops immediately. We will find the demon and exterminate him." _The _Truth and Reconciliation's_ commander disappeared from the view screen. The Fleet Commander turned away and stared blankly. He thought to himself deeply, and resolved his will.

'_At all costs'._

It had been too tedious for his taste. Guan's frustration festered with each step he had to take back to his vessel. He hated wasting

time during a hunt, especially this hunt. It was the literal turning point in his life, and it had almost seemed that every time he turned around there were more problems getting in his way. Still, he found comfort and encouragement: '_Without disappointment, you cannot appreciate victory.'_

If nothing else, he had retained trophies from those two other beasts. From one, he took its helmet along with the orange flesh that appeared to be its head. From the other, he detached one of the long, seemingly unbreakable spikes from off of its back. He thought to himself that the spike could be made into a decent hunting weapon. Perhaps, after this was all over, he would have time.

After a short sprint, he finally reached his craft; he checked the area to make sure there were no enemies nearby, and after assuring his privacy, used the remote on his wrist to open the cloaked vessel. He speedily approached and jogged up the ramp, passing through the open entrance and quickly closing it.

He released a sigh of relief; relief that he was now free to continue the hunt. But where was the _Ooman_? They had escaped using one of the alien craft, so he was bound to be many kilometers from there.

Guan knew that the aliens had excellent surveillance of this ring world, due to the size of their fleet. During his time at the Ring, he would occasionally monitor their communications, which were used primarily for military information: a battle net of sorts. Maybe _they_ could locate his prey for him.

After running the gibberish that he heard through his translator, he soon found out that the _Ooman's_ invasion of the alien vessel was big news. Apparently, they had been sent aboard to extract certain individuals from their ship; in particular the commanding officer of the _Ooman's_ vessel.

He also noted that there were reports of troop increases near a certain part of the Ring: an island, amidst a large sea. Guan carefully hacked further into the battle net and retrieved the coordinates and details of this large troop deployment there. It appeared to be a place of importance where the aliens felt needed to be heavily defended, and were going to ostensibly extensive lengths to make it so.

'_But why would they fortify a place where they felt safe?_'_

Guan knew that the aliens were ignorant of his presence, so they would only be guarding it from the _Oomans_. Perhaps they planned on striking that island, but they wouldn't send in any strike force against such strong defenses unless they sent this Super-Soldier as well.

'_An intelligent enemy strikes where one feels safest.'_ That's where the _Ooman_ was going.

'_My Prey will be there; and where my Prey leads, I will follow.'_

Two green UNSC pelican transports dashed over the vast, cerulean ocean of water that stretched as far as the eye could see. On the

horizon, there was a small island expanding not even a kilometer in any direction. It had a series of metallic structures built throughout the interior.

After escaping from the _Truth and Reconciliation_, the Captain had taken the Covenant drop ship to the secret UNSC base on the Ring. After monitoring the Covenant battle net, Cortana formulated a plan of action.

The sun had risen only several hours ago and the marines had been allowed only a few hours of sleep. After that long ride in that cramped Covenant drop ship, they were somewhat weary and unprepared for battle.

The wind blew against the Chief's armor as the pelican flew towards the Covenant held facility straight ahead. The island appeared closer and closer as the two transports approached.

"The Covenant believe that what they call the 'Silent Cartographer' is somewhere under this island," she informed the marines. "The Cartographer is a map room that will lead us to _Halo's_ control center."

"Eh, that doesn't sound too hard," said Mendoza.

"Don't get cocky now, marine," said Sergeant Dubbo. "Those Covenant aren't going to give it to us on a silver platter."

"The Island has multiple structures and installations." Cortana continued. "One of them contains the map room."

They were almost to the Island now, and Foehammer began to circle the perimeter.

"We're approaching the LZ, it's gonna be hot." she cautioned the marines. "Get set to come out swingin'."

"You heard the lady!" said Johnson. "Get ready for some action!"

The two pelicans slowed and held positions over a clear and unguarded section of the beach. They began their decent and gently hovered over the golden sand.

"Touchdown," said Foehammer. "Hit it, Marines!"

Twelve marines busted from the rear compartments of the transports; of these marines included Johnson and the Chief.

The transports' engines had created a light sandstorm effect, and the marine's visibility was slightly limited. The Chief leveled his assault rifle and charged through the dust, attempting to locate the Covenant defenses. On his motion tracker, he could see them. They were based just on the other side of the small hill that the marines were traversing. They cleared the cloud of dust just as they reached the top of the hill and then it began.

The Covenant fired directly at the marines, dropping several of them to the coarse sand with their plasma weapons. The rest of the marines scrambled and attempted to flank the enemy. A number of the marines lobbed grenades into the fray hoping to kill some Covenant, and force

them into a hasty retreat. The remaining grunts, as normal, fled, leaving the elites and jackals to be mowed down.

The Enemy had taken their last stand directly below a metal arch which came out of the side of the cliff at the top of the next hill. The jackals had their energy shields for protection but the others used a group of small boulders to shelter them from the marine's gun fire. The marines couldn't get close enough to do any damage; their assault rifles were only meant for short to moderate range combat.

The jackals laid down cover fire for the elites as they moved into position, attempting to pick off a few careless marines. Johnson pushed them back with short bursts of bullets from his weapon. The Covenant were smarter than to try that again.

Johnson retreated a couple meters to keep himself and his men out of range of the Covenant weapons; he needed to formulate a battle plan. Johnson came up along side the Chief.

"It's a stand off, Chief. They're holdin' that hill pretty good." The Chief studied the battle field and quickly devised a cunning strategy.

"Take your men up the hill and distract them with suppressive fire. I'll take two men and sneak around the base of the arch and attack them from the side."

"Right, Chief. Come on men! Let's move in." Johnson lowered to a crouch and made his way up the hill, his men right behind. The jackals pelted the marines with hot bolts of green plasma as they pushed forward. Johnson and his men rose and charged into the jackals and beat them to the ground using the butts of their rifles, but several unsuspecting marines were also beaten to the ground by the elites who appeared from behind the rocks.

The Chief and the two other marines had already circled the base of the arch and stormed up the hill, riddling the Covenant soldiers from the side. The battle was soon over but the marines had sustained several casualties and several wounded. They regrouped at the top of the hill. They all felt like "king of the hill" but deep down, they all knew who the real king was.

The Chief quickly glanced at the outstretched beach and cliff that towered above them to make sure there were no Covenant still lurking around. While the marines reloaded their weapons and checked them for damage, Cortana reported in.

"Echo four nineteen; the area is secure."

"Affirmative; Echo four nineteen, inbound. Somebody order a warthog?"

"Music to my ears, Foehammer." said Dubbo.

"I didn't know you made house calls, Foehammer." added Stacker.

"You know our motto: we deliver!"

Foehammer piloted the pelican above the landing zone that was indicated to her by Cortana, and released the warthog that was attached to the underside.

The Warthog was covered in a layer of green paint which was standard on most UNSC off road vehicles; it was also equipped with a 12.7mm chain gun, conveniently mounted on the back.

The Chief grabbed the frame of the warthog and pulled himself into the driver's seat. He activated the ignition, and revved the quiet engine up as two marines approached. One walked over to the passenger side and pulled himself in while the other manned the chain gun turret.

"We're ready, sir." said the marine next to the Chief.

"Let's move out." said Cortana.

Though the Chief was not eager to go into battle against the increased Covenant defenses on the Island, he thought it better than experiencing that feeling of paranoia. He hated admitting, even to himself, that he had been feeling very anxious about whatever he witnessed back at the life-boat, almost to the point of being afraid. He hadn't experienced such feelings since he was a little child, before he entered the Spartan program at age six. He didn't like it.

However, he never saw any evidence that anything was out to get him.

'â€| but neither did the Covenant.'

The three marines cautiously entered the cliff-side building, and stared down the short hallway which led into the Island interior. They had driven halfway around the beach until they discovered a large island structure which had been heavily garrisoned by the Covenant. They wouldn't guard something unless it was important, so naturally the Chief invited himself right in, not neglecting to kill some Covenant as well.

On either side of the hallway there was a row of large alcoves that apparently were being used for weapon storage by the Covenant. At the end of the hallway and to the right, there was a ramp that led about twenty feet down. As they descended, the Chief noticed three red blips flashing on his motion tracker that became more intense the lower they went. When they reached the bottom of the ramp they turned to their left where they could see their enemy a little lower down.

"Don't make a sound," ordered the Chief when he began to sneak down the passage way. The other two marines crept slowly and silently behind, down to the bottom of the second ramp. As they neared, they heard the distinctly deep voices of several elites.

The Chief peered around the corner and saw the three elites standing in a row, gazing through a window into the vast, subterranean chasm. The inside of the Ring was definitely mechanical - not natural; the entire chasm was comprised of some sort of alloy.

The Covenant were doing their level best to keep the humans from

entering the Ring's interior for fear that they may discover the location of _Halo's_ control center. He also saw that at the other side of the small room was an open door that he assumed led further into the installation and ultimately, to the Silent Cartographer.

"Do you think the Infidels could make it down here?" one asked another.

"They'd need an army of Spartans to make it past our defenses." said the one in the center.

"It's a good thing that we destroyed the Spartans when we did, or they could've caused some serious problems later on." remarked the one on the right.

"A friend of mine on the _Truth and Reconciliation_ told me that one of them boarded their vessel and rescued the human commander."

"Impossible." the middle one firmly stated. "No human could successfully enter a Covenant ship and survive."

"And why not?" interjected an ultra that had just entered the room; he had apparently overheard their conversation. "Our attacks upon the humans have more than likely strengthened their resolve. And now, with rallied leadership, they will cause more difficulties for us. But keep your faith in the Covenant, for we will send these infidels to their graves soon enough."

The Chief reached for his belt and retrieved one of his four fragmentation grenades that were attached to it; he tightly gripped it in his hand, took a deep breath, and threw.

The grenade skipped down into the room and settled in the middle of the gathered elites, who looked down in sudden surprise. The Chief and the marines prepared for a loud explosion but instead they could only hear the confused murmurs of the elites.

The one nearest to the ramp removed his weapon from its holster and strode up the short ramp expecting to find a few helpless infidels cowering before him, but instead he found nothing. The elite began sniffing the air around him to identify the assailant who recently attempted to blast him and his comrades to tiny bits.

He immediately caught a scent and twisted around only to receive the end of an assault rifle in his gut and then in his face. The Chief and the two marines leapt down into the tiny room and discharged their weapons at the enemy. The other two elites had already withdrawn their weapons and were ready to defend themselves, while the Ultra suddenly vanished from sight.

The marines' bullets ricocheted off of the elites' shields and struck the ceiling and the walls. The sound of weapons fire and the yells of the elites and marines filled the room and rang in their ears. They drove the marines back up the ramp so the Chief brought his foot up and kicked the leading elite in the chest. The Covenant soldier fell back and knocked over his cohort, both slamming onto the hard metal floor. The Chief was about to charge back in when he noticed that the grenade was still on the floor where it had landed earlier. He took

his pistol into his hand and discharged a bullet at the grenade.

The bullet exploded on contact and the grenade shattered. The explosion charred the elites; they did not get back up this time. The Chief and the marines quickly strode into the room again and headed towards the door. But the Ultra suddenly reappeared at the door and was prepared to close it on the marines, which would keep them from their objective.

"Don't let him lock the door!" yelled Cortana!

The Chief ran across the room and was about to rush into the corridor when the Ultra tapped the door console and the two door panels started to slide closed. The Chief skidded to a stop, dropped his assault rifle, and outstretched his arms, grabbing the panels as they enclosed on him. He was barely holding the door open.

The Ultra withdrew his sword and activated it, the two pronged blade flaring brightly and extending to its full, three foot length. He dropped to a running stance and lunged towards the Chief.

Expecting this move, the Chief braced himself on the panels and lifted his legs into the air and kicked the elite in the head as hard as he could. It either knocked him unconscious or killed him, but the Chief couldn't tell.

'_That was easy.'_

He checked the elite for vital signs. He was unconscious alright, and was bound to stay that way for a long time. He didn't bother to finish him off: they had already made too much noise and there wasn't any point in wasting ammunition on a napping elite.

With ease, the Chief pushed with his right arm on one of the door panels and stretched his left arm over to the console and re-opened the door. Relieved to have his arms free again, he picked up his weapon and motioned the astonished marines.

"We're clear."

End
file.